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INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Written statement*/ submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 March 2000]

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*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples

Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker is taking advantage of the halfway stage in the UN Decade for Indigenous Peoples, reached in December, to urge the rapid adoption without further modification of the existing draft text of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Discussion of the rights of aboriginal peoples commenced in the 1980s and the draft Declaration which the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations spent years drawing up has been available since 1993.

For the last four years the Ad-Hoc Working Group set up by the Human Rights Commission has been discussing this draft text without any solution to the central issues apparently being in sight. To date consensus has been reached on only two of the 45 articles contained in the draft. We ask ourselves why those States who are currently expressing reservations could not have voiced their concerns as to the wording at some time during those earlier years. They were, after all, represented in the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations throughout that time by delegations with observer status who were able to address the Working Group directly.

Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker supports those indigenous peoples who are specifically asserting their right to self-determination and to the occupation of their traditional homelands. We consider the argument that this might encourage attempts at secession to be essentially a pretext for denying them the basic right to determine their own political status within the nation-state. That would of course pose a challenge to the principle of the unified state that many states continue to uphold. However the future of our modern age and of democracy lies in maintaining a diversity of cultures and hence in a multinational constitutional framework for the state.

Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker urges the Human Rights Commission to reject attempts to restrict the access of indigenous representatives to the deliberations of the Working Group. We also call on the Human Rights Commission to adopt the existing draft of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples without further delay and to encourage the rapporteur of the Ad-Hoc Working Group to act accordingly.